

to abolish the monarchy, contenting themselves with demanding greater autonomy. Only when the French launched a war to regain their Asian colonies did Son Ngoc Tan demand complete independence. The weaknesses of the middle class were well illustrated in October 1945 when the French had reentered Saigon but had not set foot in Kampuchean territory. A minister in Son Ngoc Tan government, one Khim Tit, flew to Saigon to negotiate with the French commandant in chief, general Leclerc. There he was bribed by followers of Sihanouk and upon his return to Phnom Penh General Leclerc and two other officers flew into Kampuchea, arrested Son Ngoc Tan and carried him off to Saigon without any interference at all. The middle class government collapsed immediately and made no further attempt to challenge the monarchy until 1970.

In 1952, the Buddhist hierarchy began to support the nationalist demands for independence. In order to forestall a nationalist uprising king Sihanouk "rebelled" against the French who were deeply engaged at Dien Bien Phu and then allowed Kampuchea independence. In interviews at the time Sihanouk explained that he had acted to prevent the nationalists being allowed to appear as Liberators and abolishing the monarchy. Yet eventual declaration of a republic in 1970 revealed how far from being radical nationalist movement the middle class were as power after Sihanouk's overthrow passed into the hands of one of his long term supporters, Lon Nol.....(see next line) rather than genuine radicals such as Son Ngoc Tanh or Sirik Matak. Lon Nol, a deeply superstitious person who once suggested that Phnom Penh would be best defended by sprinkling holy sand round its outskirts, was once said to practise Sihanoukism without Sihanouk. From the beginning of his government in 1970 the country entered a period of almost total collapse. The countryside was unsafe and in consequence food production dropped drastically. Industrial output too failed and the economy came to depend upon lavish American grants. The huge scale of American investment produced widespread corruption. Honest administrators, officers or politicians either fled to France or joined Khmer Rouge. Often United States weaponry passed straight from Lon Nol's forces into the hands of the Khmer Rouge and although the Nixon administration was aware of the state of affairs it made no effort to alter them since they regarded their Cambodian operations as a side show to tie down Vietnamese forces and thus prolong the Thieu regime in Saigon for a little longer. With the American pullout of troops in 1970-1971 from Indochina, the United States began to rely upon massive air strikes against the Vietnamese supply lines through Kampuchea (the Ho Chi Minh trail) to slow down the Viet Cong take over, it is estimated that almost half a million tons of high explosive were dropped on Kampuchea between February and August 1973. This bombing campaign shattered the already feeble economy and totally disrupted the fabric of society. Thousands of villages were destroyed, families separated and ten of thousands of refugees driven from their homes. During this period the rage and hate of the Khmer people helped Pol Pot to gain control of the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge had its origins in the struggle for independence of the years 1945-1955. The Vietminh, who were fighting the French in their own country began seeking contacts in Kampuchea in an effort to relieve some of the pressure on themselves by forcing the French to extend their forces. At first, they used their country men living in Kampuchea as well as Khmers from South Vietnam but this movement was defeated in 1954 and fragmented with only a small group known as the Pracheanchon remaining both partly legal and in opposition to Sihanouk. This group was later joined by students returning from France where they had been in contact with the French Communist Party and with radicals from other third world countries, such as Samir Amin an Egyptian economist who now lives in Senegal. Pracheanchon included many people who later were to form the hard core of the Khmer Rouge: Khieu Samphan, Khieu Thirit, Khieu Ponnary, Pol Pot, (who's real name is Salath Sar), Ieng Sary and Son Sen and although some books did circulate amongst them they had little real knowledge of Marxist-Leninist theories and they remained essentially chauvinistic. For instance, Ieng Sary issued a proclamation against racially mixed marriages and Pol Pot was wont to describe himself as the "original Khmer" when signing documents. Pol Pot also revealed a lack of understanding about bolshevik theory when he visited Yugoslavia with some trotskysts at a time when Tito was being denounced as fascist by the orthodox communist line - during this visit, Pol Pot was a member of the French Communist Party. Such people could not help view the Vietminh influence with Pracheanchon except with distrust and, in view of the historic enmity between Vietnam and Kampuchea, it should not be too surprising to find that the Pol Pot clique quickly gained the ascendancy over "the agents of Vietnamese imperialism".

Sihanoukist repression during the sixties forced Pol Pot et al to flee the cities. At first they sheltered in the lowland but they had to move into the highlands amongst the Montagnards who became, so Pol Pot later claimed, their most ardent followers. Such an alliance of middle class radicals and primitive hill tribes could not of course have taken control of Kampuchea under normal conditions. The Khmer farmers in the lowlands did not support them because fertile soil and the absence of landlords guaranteed

the peasants survival . However , in the confusion that followed the American intervention , the Khmer Rouge became the major force in the country . Intellectuals who had previously sided with Lon Nol either fled abroad or joined the Khmer Rouge where they helped to fuel the leadership struggle and often lost their lives - Hou Yuon , Hu Nim , So Phim , Koy Thuon and Poch Deuscomar along with many other notable figures all disappeared at this time , in which Pol Pot emerged supreme and unchallenged especially after the Khmer Rouge conquered the whole country in 1975 .

Once established in power the policy of Pol Pot and his Montagnards followers were ruthlessly pursued : the middle class was eliminated , the farmers repressed and technology even at the primitive level of irrigation pumps discarded, education , medical services even communications were annihilated . The Khmer people were even forced to discard their colourful national garb in favour of Montagnard black cloth .

This iconoclasm was not the result of a bolshevik middle class striving towards the establishment of State Capitalism ; Lenin and Trotsky used tsarist officers to build the Red Army and Mao used "capitalist " engineers to run the Chinese economy after 1949 . Instead it was the result of the most primitive group in a society seizing power and carrying their hatred of capitalism to illogical extremes . Just as UN intervention in the Congo in the early sixties allowed the Simbas to seize control of large areas of the country and indulge in a frenzy of destruction which at times led to the reduction of stone built houses because they were foreign symbols , so the American bombing raids of 1973 produced a dislocated society in which the Montagnards - the least affected groups - were able to dominate the country . Allied with a small radical and nationalist middle class these tribes were able to prevent the intellectuals from exercising any control over them . Indeed , many of the intellectuals themselves fell victim to Pol Pot theories . Thus , far from instituting State Capitalism , the Khmer Rouge became an instrument of one of the bloodiest counter - revolutions yet witnessed . As a direct result of foreign intervention the revolution collapsed and reaction was established . Now the Kampuchean route to State Capitalism will take place under Vietnamese direction .

Willy Van Damme - II- 1980

INTERNATIONAL GET TOGETHER

An international get together will be organised for Easter 1981 (18,19 and 20 April 81) at Osnabrück (West Germany) to discuss :

- Eastern countries mainly on East Germany , Poland and Soviet Union .
- China

For information , it is better to write directly to the German address - and as soon as possible . No text or summing up will be put in circulation before the meeting .

PAMPHLET ON POLAND

We are still working on a pamphlet concerning the struggles in Poland . A rough draft will circulate among some comrades ; the definitive text will include criticism and discussions including the Easter debates on the subject . We still invite everyone to send any original material and to take part in the discussions about the points raised in the issue n° 23

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The cost and the work of duplicating and postage impose on us a strict limitation of the circulation of Echanges : we will send Echanges only to subscribers having renounced their subscription .

PUBLICATIONS

in French : Liaisons dangereuses n° 3 - Besson BP 30 75861 Paris Cedex 20
Day to day struggles and strikes in France - Strikes in Poland -
Temporary work .

Jeune Taupe n° 34 - Librairie Parallèle - 47 rue St Honoré - 75001 Paris
12 pages out of 20 on the "Faurisson defence " and its surrounding (and a leaflet on the same subject) and only 3 pages on Poland . We have to believe that the ideological struggle (and which one ...) is four times more important than the class struggle of the Polish workers .

Agora n° 4 BP 3187 - 31027 Toulouse Cedex - A lot of very well presented articles on various but of unequal importance subjects .

in English : Root and Branch : n° 9 Box 236 - Somerville - Ma 02143 -

Steel : can rationalisation cure old age (without causing depression) ?
Let a dozen flowers bloom : The Beijing free speech Movement .
The red Brigades between stalinism and leftism - Notes on the concept of class .

Solidarity (London) Pamphlet n° 56 -C/o 123 Lathom Road, London E 6

A Fresh Look at Lenin, by Andy Brown with a postface by Ian Pirie and A.A. Raskolnikov. The last issue of Solidarity includes a separate small pamphlet on Poland.

from Cienfuegos Press. (Over the Water - Sunday - Orkney - books and pamphlets : The Christie File (Stuart Christie - The First Mayday, The Haymarket speeches (Voltairine de Cleyre) - Anarchism and Marxism (Daniel Guérin) - Anarchy (JRWhite)

We have received some materials from Barcelona dockers, on their strike, their autonomous organisation and their international contacts. We will come back on this subject in a next issue of Echanges.